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MOSCOW'S INTERWAR INFILTRATION OF BRITISH INTELLIGENCE, 1919–1929*

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ABSTRACT. *The celebrated 'Cambridge five' have hitherto been believed to be the first long-term communist penetration agents in HM government, beginning with Donald Maclean in 1935. However, new research indicates that by 1919 another Cambridge man – like four of the 'five', a Trinity graduate – had already begun working for Moscow. This article is the first to examine how William Norman Ewer, known as 'Trilby' to his co-conspirators, organized networks in Great Britain and France to target the governments of those two powers. Under close Soviet supervision, Ewer's subordinates infiltrated half-a-dozen Whitehall departments, foremost among them Scotland Yard. Operating under the aegis of the home office, the Yard was a vital cog in the machinery of government set up to combat the 'red menace' in this country immediately after the First World War. By compromising the lead agency tasked with fighting them, the Bolsheviks thus created the requisite conditions for the metastasis in Great Britain of Soviet espionage in the 1920s.*

I

> And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past', ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.'
>
> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

A leading international historian recently cautioned scholars against unquestioningly accepting material released by governments, for 'nowhere else is the researcher confronted with evidence [more] precisely managed by their subject'. 'Historians', he stresses, 'are what they eat and the convenient but unwholesome diet of processed food on offer in national archives has resulted in a flabby

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historical posture.'[1] Exacerbating it are the sensationalist British media reports normally preceding each security service (MI5) document release. A not inconsequential number of researchers in London routinely meanders blindly down paths highlighted by cursory media accounts and press releases, forgoing a meticulous examination even of such 'convenient but unwholesome' fare. The November 2002 set of documents is a perfect example, as these records raise far-reaching historical questions that have so far gone unnoticed even by the most assiduous academics and journalists.

Long before Stalin's intelligence services had ensnared in the early 1930s 'Kim' Philby and the remainder of Cambridge's most notorious quintet – Anthony Blunt, Guy Burgess, John Cairncross, and Donald Maclean – yet another Trinity man had already made a career out of betraying his country to the Soviet.[2] William Ewer – 'Trilby' to his accomplices – in time became a distinguished journalist, one intimate with numerous British luminaries. Unbeknownst to nearly all, however, throughout much of his eleven-year career as foreign editor of the socialist newspaper *Daily Herald*, Ewer had received extensive logistical and financial backing to organize, conceal, and oversee sophisticated espionage networks that targeted British and French government. Bolshevik links to leftist entities in Great Britain have been generally known for decades but only now does archival material permit a better approximation of the truth regarding these connections.

Starting in 1919, Ewer's group methodically sought out weaknesses for a decade, infiltrating several government bureaux well before the ruinous forays into public service by the 'Cambridge five' on behalf of their masters in the Kremlin. Received wisdom until now suggested that the 'five' were the first long-term communist penetration agents in British government, beginning with Donald Maclean in 1935.[3] For this reason, the ninth release of security service files is compelling grounds for revisiting Bolshevik efforts to infiltrate British intelligence in the early interwar period.

II

Knowing the principal players helps to understand the scope and successes of Ewer's organization. Eventually, it came to operate out of the London office of

[1] Richard J. Aldrich, *The hidden hand: Britain, America, and cold war secret intelligence* (London, 2001), p. 6.

[2] Though the Soviet Union did not emerge until 1923, for the sake of simplicity, 'Soviet', 'Soviet Russia', 'Soviet Union', or 'Bolshevik' refers to Russia after the Nov. 1917 revolution (Gregorian calendar).

[3] Christopher Andrew, 'F. H. Hinsley and the Cambridge moles: two patterns of intelligence recruitment', in Richard Langhorne, ed., *Diplomacy and intelligence during the Second World War: essays in honour of F. H. Hinsley* (Cambridge, 1985); Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: the inside story of its foreign operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London, 1990), pp. 155–80; Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin archive: the KGB in Europe and the west* (London, 1999), pp. 55–88. Even the most pessimistic assumptions that the earliest Soviet attempts at penetrating British officialdom were in Apr. 1923 overly optimistic. Victor Madeira, ''No wishful thinking allowed': secret service committee and intelligence reform in Great Britain, 1919–1923', *Intelligence and National Security*, 18 (2003), pp. 1–20.

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the Federated Press of America (FPA), supposedly an international news agency but in reality a Communist International (Comintern)[4] front. So far as we know at this time, the network primarily consisted of Ewer; his lieutenant in Paris, George Slocombe; Walter Dale, the group's security officer; and Arthur Lakey, an FPA member from 1919 to 1927 who subsequently became an MI5 informer, code-named 'Allen'. There were other agents, but since they were comparatively less significant, pertinent information about them will appear as needed.

Educated at Merchant Tailors' school and Trinity College, Cambridge – whence he received his undergraduate degree in 1907 – William Ewer first aroused official curiosity in July 1915, after making a pacifist speech. Refusing to serve in the military, he registered as a conscientious objector in 1917. In early 1919, Ewer joined the *Daily Herald*. By April of that year, just shy of his thirty-fourth birthday, he had become that newspaper's foreign editor, remaining so until falling out with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in December 1929 over a supposedly 'deviationist' article that he had refused to retract.[5] Ewer's deputy in Paris, George Slocombe, was also a reporter. Unlike his chief, Slocombe did fight in the First World War, despite also having pacifist sympathies and having joined the editorial staff of the *Daily Herald* in 1912, aged eighteen. Three years in the air force, beginning in 1916, interrupted his journalistic career, which again resumed in 1919. Later that year, Slocombe became chief foreign correspondent for the newspaper, a position held until 1931.[6]

Walter Dale was dismissed from the London metropolitan police for striking.[7] He and others like him subsequently found employment either with local pro-Bolshevik organizations or eventually with the Soviets themselves, when they opened various agencies in Britain. Dale became the chief investigator for the Vigilance detective agency (VDA), which worked with FPA. So dedicated was he that not even the driver of the chief of Indian political intelligence[8] (the liaison office here of the Indian government's security section, the Delhi intelligence bureau)[9] was immune from attempted recruitment as an informant.

The final key protagonist was Arthur Lakey, a Scotland Yard sergeant until his discharge following the August 1919 police walkout. After that, his surname

[4] Established in Mar. 1919 to spread revolution worldwide by any means. Soviet intelligence used Comintern extensively as cover for foreign operations until the early 1940s.

[5] Part II, Ewer, KV 2/1016, p. 1; Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 6.

[6] Part II, Slocombe, KV 2/1016, p. 2. In 1923, Slocombe apparently had as his mistress Clare Sheridan, a staunch communist and cousin of Winston Churchill. *Renseignements a/s de Clare Sheridan, 10 avril 1923*, FM carton (henceforth 'c.') 1034, dossier (henceforth 'd.') 4614, pp. 9–10, 14.

[7] The first strike, in 1918, was over wages and service conditions in the London metropolitan police, while the second occurred over the government's refusal to allow the unionization of the force in 1919. The war cabinet supported the dismissal of all officers who had walked out, 2,365 in all: from London (1,156); Liverpool (954); and Birmingham (119). They were never reinstated. Richard Thurlow, *The secret state: British internal security in the twentieth century* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 119–20; Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 1.

[8] KV 2/998 precautionary index.

[9] Christopher Andrew, *Her Majesty's secret service: the making of the British intelligence community* (New York, 1986), p. 277.

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became 'Allen' (also the security service codename for him, retained hereafter). Having served for eleven years as a navy seaman, he requested a release, joining the police in November 1911. Soon after the Yard fired him, Allen entered FPA and within two years became a manager, a post held until November 1927. Months later, he began informing MI5 on FPA activities prior to late 1924, when they first aroused suspicion.[10] With such preliminaries addressed, let us then examine how this Soviet network materialized.

III

The group's exact origins and precisely which section of Soviet intelligence ran Ewer's organization remain unclear, but everything points to the *Cheka*.[11] Founded on 20 December 1917, this was the first Bolshevik security organ, forerunner of the dreaded 'committee for state security', or KGB. Although FPA fronted for the Comintern – itself usually a cover for Soviet military intelligence (RU)[12] operations – and one discerns some interest in military matters,[13] Ewer and his people seemed almost solely concerned with political and counterintelligence information, even if RU too gathered all it could on these topics. In any case, Allen believed that the *chekisty* ran FPA, for Ewer worked closely with Nikolai Klimentovich Klishko. Officially the secretary of the trade delegation that came to London in May 1920 to negotiate the Anglo-Russian trade agreement (signed on 16 March 1921), he was also a *Cheka* officer[14] and

[10] KV 2/989 (fo. 72A), p. 8; idem (fo. 62A); Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 1.

[11] 'All-Russian extraordinary commission for combating counterrevolution, sabotage, and speculation.' Became 'combined state political directorate' (OGPU) in July 1923 (to July 1934). Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Mitrokhin*, p. ix; Vasiliy Mitrokhin, ed., *KGB lexicon: the Soviet intelligence officer's handbook* (London, 2002), p. xiv.

[12] 'Registration department', until 1921. From then to 1926, it was *Razvedupr* ('intelligence department'), becoming the 'fourth department' in 1926. In 1942, it became 'GRU'. Raymond W. Leonard, *Secret soldiers of the revolution: Soviet military intelligence, 1918–1933* (Westport, CT, 1999).

[13] John Wilkinson knew Ewer and others in his network well. If not an outright communist, then Wilkinson certainly supported them. He worked at Woolwich arsenal as a chemist from 1914 to 1939, researching chemical warfare agents, among other things. His name appeared in 1925 in a secret card index of a CPGB member. By 1950, as MI5 was winding down the FPA investigation, Wilkinson was a senior scientist at the ministry of supply. Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 755a), p. 3; KV 2/1017 (fo. 1109) minutes. While not discounting the possibility that FPA was an RU network, two things suggest that the *Cheka* was in charge. First, FPA targets were mainly political and intelligence in nature, more what the remit would be for the *Cheka*. Second, most accounts on Soviet intelligence mention the legendary rivalries between the political and military espionage services. If through FPA the *Cheka* acquired not only political and counterintelligence information but also military data, this would be welcome from an institutional perspective, as more attention from the leadership meant more power and funding, to the detriment of competing agencies. Alas, only when Russian intelligence archives open more fully will the mystery vanish.

[14] Born in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he studied at the *lycée moderne*. An engineer by training and a staunch Bolshevik, Klishko was exiled to Vologda by the tsarist regime. He was a long-time member of the Russian social-democratic labour party (RSDLP). From 1907 to 1918, he was an exile in London, belonging to the local RSDLP committee, of which Maxim Litvinov (a future foreign minister) was for some time secretary. In Aug. 1918, Klishko was deported with Litvinov and, upon arrival in Russia,

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one of the most knowledgeable persons regarding communist espionage in this country.[15]

Major Maxwell Knight (security service) questioned Ewer on these and other matters several times throughout 1950, the year when inquiries into FPA activities appear finally to have wound down. In their second interview, Ewer declared quite (dis)ingenuously that to him, FPA operations were 'purely counter'. The remit was to ascertain British intelligence and counterintelligence capabilities, and what countermeasures existed against Soviet and CPGB activities in Britain. Other than through Slocombe in Paris, alleged Ewer, FPA firmly abstained from espionage.[16] Not until travelling to Moscow in 1922, Ewer concluded, did the Russians actually approach and ask whether he could assist them in the areas just mentioned.[17] Without much greater access to pertinent Russian intelligence and foreign policy archives for this period, one cannot gauge such claims too accurately. However, as we shall see, the veteran journalist was being more than just a little economical with the truth.

In fact, though exactly when Ewer began working for Moscow remains unknown, the earliest entry in his MI5 file concerning pro-Bolshevik activities is dated 2 February 1919; he was certainly 'watched from 1920 onwards'.[18] Ewer claimed that the 'forged *Pravda*' incident[19] of 1918 prompted him to form his network. That year, Menshevik forgeries of the communist paper *Pravda* (truth) appeared here. Back then, many on the British left believed in collusion by HM government in the dissemination and perhaps even the production of these counterfeit newspapers. Allen, the spy-turned-informant, clarified much. Dismissed from the police in mid-1919, he then contacted Jack Hayes, leader of the Federation of Prison and Police Officers and also head of the VDA. Ewer had asked Hayes to look for individuals willing to conduct 'political enquiries, ostensibly on behalf of the Labour Party', so Allen was called in, introduced, and hired. Successfully carrying out all tasks given to him, he learnt from Ewer sometime in 1921 that all assignments until then had actually been 'for and on behalf of the Russian Government'.

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was appointed assistant director of the publishing department of the Soviet government. In Jan. 1920, Klishko became secretary of the peace delegation in Estonia, and in May 1920 was made secretary of the Russian trade delegation in England. Here, he was political head of mission and the *Cheka* representative. His main duty was 'la surveillance minutieuse de l'activité de Krassine et des autres membres de la délégation'. *Note sur la composition de la mission commerciale soviétique et de la délégation des cooperatives russes 'Arcos' à Londres, 13 juin 1922/23* (illegible), FM c. 353, d. 1208, p. 437; Who's who in Soviet Russia, 9 Apr. 1923, FO 371/9365 (N3179), p. 81.

[15] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), pp. 6–7; 27 June 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 2A), p. 3.

[16] Knight disagreed: 'this I am not prepared to accept. It is quite impossible to run a counter-espionage organisation of this kind without performing acts which are to all intents and purposes espionage. Also, it seems to me to be almost equally impossible to run an organisation like the Federated Press of America without obtaining information which is not purely "counter".' 30 Jan. 1950, KV 2/1017 (fo. 1105a), p. 2.

[17] Ibid.

[18] E-mail correspondence: Dr Gill Bennett, Cambridge, June 2003.

[19] 30 Jan. 1950, KV 2/1017 (fo. 1105a), p. 2.

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After assenting when asked whether he would carry on, Allen was told to contact Klishko, on whose orders and at whose expense he rented an apartment in London, there residing and conducting office work until about 1923. When Klishko departed, another intelligence officer, named Bittner,[20] replaced him. Shortly after Ewer's admission to Allen in 1921, a Bolshevik named Grinfeld (whose brother was secretary to Leonid Krasin, head of the Soviet trade delegation in London)[21] visited England. Klishko introduced Grinfeld to Allen as a member of Russian intelligence. Before returning to Moscow sometime in 1922, the visitor contacted FPA, which worked with him and Klishko on espionage matters. Thus, since Walter Dale was but one of several former police officers at VDA (as had once been the father of Rose Edwardes, a courier for the cell), the inescapable conclusion is that Jack Hayes talent-spotted for Ewer inside the law enforcement community.[22]

Because Allen knew only parts of the organization, the picture from 1919 to 1924 is incomplete. Yet what he did reveal seemed consistently reliable, according to the security service. The portion of the network consisting of Allen, Dale, and Edwardes originally operated from the aforesaid flat at 51 Ridgmount Gardens, Bloomsbury, taken on Klishko's instructions. In 1923, Ewer visited Moscow. There, the decision was made to run the existing organization under the cover of a news agency. With help from Karl Hässler (an FPA director in New York), Ewer set up this front, with offices in room 50, Outer Temple, 222-5 Strand, London. Things went smoothly until the 12 May 1927 police raid on the all-Russian co-operative society (Arcos, a legitimate commercial representation also used to support Soviet subversion and espionage here) that halted bilateral relations for two years.

What led to the raid on Arcos's premises at 49 Moorgate Street, Moorgate, London – shared, incidentally, by the Soviet trade delegation – was the apparent theft of a British military manual by someone in Moscow's pay. British security officials were convinced that said volume would be found at Arcos, but this was not so. Allen suggested that the manual had already been spirited to Berlin three weeks prior, something that the authorities at the time could not confirm.[23] The precise timing of the police raid was ultimately dictated by a series of political, diplomatic, and intelligence crises that, in the right sequence, provided the

[20] Joseph Bittner, alias 'Ignaz Perl', alias 'Bourtovich'. Born 3 Apr. 1884 (Vienna), son of Adolph and Augusta (*née* Jelnick). Czechoslovak subject. FM c. 1349, d. 2540, pp. 15, 47, 53.

[21] Maximilian Grinfeld, INO (*Cheka* foreign intelligence) and KRO (*Cheka* counterintelligence) member. In 1923, he served in the Baltic republics and, in 1927, in Constantinople. Used journalistic cover. *Compte-rendu spécial no. 56/CPLE a/s de Grinfeld, délégué de l'OGPU à CONS/PLE, 5 avril 1927*, FM c. 229, d. 1548, p. 202; FM finding aid. The brother, secretary to Krasin, was Nathan Grinfeld. Born 28 May 1884, in Kichinev (Russia), he was a Comintern courier, travelling between Germany, Switzerland, and Britain. FM c. 229, d. 1548, p. 64; FM c. 1324, d. 2812, p. 7.

[22] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 1; KV 2/989 (fos. 84a, 84b), pp. 1–2; idem (fo. 69A), pp. 4–5. Also assisting Dale were James Marston (dismissed from Scotland Yard; subsequently employed by Arcos) and George Pratt (another former policeman, employed by the Arcos bank). Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 809a), pp. 6–7.

[23] 20 Aug. 1928, KV 2/989, fo. 72A, p. 11.

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'stray spark' that ignited 'the dry kindling', so derailing Anglo-Soviet relations for a spell.[24]

Consequently, Ewer's group experienced money shortages. Departing Russian diplomats gave him a month's funding to continue work. Having exhausted this capital, Ewer went to the Soviet embassy in Paris. Once back, he told Allen that Moscow wanted the entire network closed down. In November 1927, Allen received severance pay and was dismissed. Yet Ewer either was not entirely truthful with his agent or the Soviets revived ties sometime after March 1928, when FPA offices closed. Phoenix-like, the group became the Featherstone typewriting bureau and soon resumed operations out of the Featherstone buildings in Holborn, until May 1929.[25] Even so, all this is but the proverbial tip of the iceberg. By late 1924, FPA finally caught the attention of MI5, resulting in many disturbing but fascinating incidents accruing in files recently made public.

IV

A good example is the infamous October 1924 'Zinoviev letter' that purportedly contained Comintern orders to British communists to prepare for revolution by subverting the military and conscripting the Labour party to the cause by any means. Appearing mere weeks before the November 1924 general election, this document afforded conservatives their long-sought opportunity to 'prove' emphatically that Labour – then in government for the first time in British history – was in Moscow's pocket. Allen stated that the CPGB had categorically reassured Ewer of never having received said document. On the other hand, the British secret intelligence service (SIS) steadfastly claimed to have acquired a copy of the note and endorsed its authenticity. Allen insisted that two or three days before the letter unexpectedly appeared in print on 25 October, Dale – then watching SIS offices on Adam Street – had reported intense activity there, leading up to circumspect visits by 'three or four' very senior intelligence officials, all in private vehicles.[26] Convinced of perfidy by the reactionary security establishment against the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald in the lead-up to a general election, the former FPA manager may have wanted to convince himself and others of his theory's feasibility. Recent research does suggest far greater involvement in the affair than formerly held by select diplomats and intelligence officials, acting of their own volition. The overall conclusion was that the October 1924 letter, though similar in form and content to many others previously sent by Moscow, was almost certainly a forgery.[27]

[24] While researching her upcoming biography of Desmond Morton (Winston Churchill's intelligence adviser), Dr Gill Bennett has unearthed much spectacular detail on all aspects of the Arcos affair. 'The Arcos raid of 1927.' Presentation to Study Group on Intelligence, Royal United Services Institute, 31 Jan. 2003.

[25] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), pp. 1–2, 4–5; part III, Kenneth Milton correspondence, KV 2/1016, p. 1; KV 2/989 (fo. 84b), p. 2.

[26] 7 Sept. 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 77a), p. 2.

[27] Gill Bennett, *History notes: 'A most extraordinary and mysterious business': the Zinoviev letter of 1924* (London, 1999).

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Weeks later, on 21 November 1924, the *Daily Herald* carried this: 'NOTICE – SECRET SERVICE – Labour group carrying out investigations would be glad to receive information and details from anyone who has ever had any association with, or been brought into touch with, any Secret Service department or operation. Write in the first instance Box 573, Daily Herald.' The security service instructed one of its own to answer and attend any suggested meeting. The first time, nobody met the agent, though Dale continually watched him. Ewer later met the man several times, seeking sensitive information on British intelligence. Dale continued following the man, eventually uncovering his MI5 ties. The advert, it seems, had aimed to expose an informer (likely the same man) whose previous efforts to infiltrate communist circles had aroused suspicion. The FPA promptly terminated all contact.[28]

Yet by now, FPA itself was under scrutiny. The authorities shadowed Dale, leading them to Rose Edwardes, who in turn led the security service to Outer Temple. Home office imposed a postal intercept warrant on the address in early February 1925. On the eleventh of that month, a package addressed to 'Kenneth Milton, Esq.' (i.e., Ewer) arrived, containing reports typed in French on Moroccan, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Romanian affairs. Forty-eight hours later, MI5 concluded from FPA telephone contracts that Ewer ran the office, with Allen's assistance. Telephone intercepts revealed that FPA dealt with Arcos, the Russian telegraph agency (Rosta), Chesham house (Soviet embassy), and Jack Hayes's VDA.[29] The FPA–VDA partnership meant that the latter followed and watched members of Arcos and related organizations; observed particular embassies in London; shadowed certain CPGB members; and did likewise to persons suspected of being British intelligence agents.[30] Moscow, naturally, received all this information.

Packets to 'Milton' from unknown persons in Paris arrived almost daily, containing at least one of four sorts of documents: facsimiles of dispatches from French ambassadors in various capitals; information on French political and fiscal affairs; unsigned typewritten letters accompanying English plain-language codes; and occasional messages from the Indian communist M. N. Roy (or his wife) to comrades in England. Ewer's gaffe on 8 May 1925, however, exposed his Paris agent. That day, the *Daily Herald* carried an article on French Morocco 'from our own correspondent, George Slocombe' that was virtually a reprint of a note that had been sent to 'Milton' two days prior and intercepted. Slocombe was at this time working as foreign correspondent for the *Herald* and as FPA manager in Paris. Another postal warrant was immediately issued, this time for his private and business addresses.

Plain-language coded letters signed 'T' ('Trilby' was Ewer's nickname) were soon intercepted. Correspondence analysis showed that Slocombe received from

[28] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 2.
[29] Ibid., pp. 2–3.
[30] KV 2/989 (unnumbered fo., after fo. 62A), p. 2.

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Ewer about $1,000 monthly,[31] spending over a third of that on bribes to have removed from the Quai d'Orsay (French foreign ministry) and from several of its embassies copies of classified documents. From postal intercepts, British authorities quickly deduced that Ewer frequently forwarded to Slocombe Russian evaluations of intelligence acquired from French government. Unfortunately, no such reports survive in files recently made public. By October 1925, letters hinted at plans to circumvent the London FPA and have everything sent directly to Moscow, due to the impending arrival in the French capital of a Russian to run Slocombe, who was displeased with the proposed arrangement. Post for 'Milton' continued arriving intermittently until 1927, then ending.[32] Interestingly, Leonid Krasin – the head of the 1920 Soviet trade delegation here and, by 1925, ambassador in Paris – was not privy to FPA secrets. That the idea to bypass London and send Paris material directly to Moscow coincided exactly with the reassignment to the French capital of Kristian Rakovsky (until then the Russian *chargé d'affaires* in Britain) to replace Krasin suggests that up to his transfer, Rakovsky probably had overseen and/or financed the London FPA in some capacity and would now do likewise for operations across the channel.[33]

Back in England, meanwhile, investigations continued into activities at Outer Temple, albeit with difficulty; security service watchers attempting surveillance found themselves in turn watched by VDA detectives. Information acquired in 1928 (corroborated by Dale's diary, seized in 1929) confirmed that from 1922 to 1927, Allen was the intermediary between Ewer and his two prize informants, about whom more will follow. Among other things, they revealed the location of British intelligence offices, allowing VDA to watch these agencies and follow any staff on whose movements Moscow was keen.[34]

Dale's diary highlighted four areas of responsibility: (i) to observe 'the offices of … British intelligence, … the staffs … , and … persons with whom staff members were in contact'; (ii) 'observing Russians resident in this country who were looked upon with suspicion by the Soviet government'; (iii) investigating 'prominent political or social personages about whom the Soviet government required information'; and (iv) to ensure 'that Ewer and other persons … were not observed or shadowed by MI5 or the police'. Dale undoubtedly carried out his first duty efficiently. Throughout the seven years covered by his diary, he and other VDA detectives incessantly watched buildings and employees of the government code and cipher school (GCCS, Britain's interwar codebreakers), the security service, and SIS, among others. Official cars were followed and painstaking efforts were made to locate the homes of intelligence officers and

[31] www.eh.net 'how much is that?' US$1,000 (1925) equals US$10,200/£6,496 (2002).

[32] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), pp. 2–3.

[33] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 809a), p. 4. Born in Kotel (Bulgaria) on 13/15 Aug. 1873. Lived in France for many years; studied medicine in Montpellier. Became ambassador on 28 Oct. 1925. FM c. 229, d. 1548, pp. 66, 254.

[34] KV 2/989 (fo. 66a), pp. 6–7; 24 July 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 63A), p. 3, 27 June 1928 (fo. 2A), p. 2; Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 4.

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secretarial staff. This was how Ewer's group identified in 1923 an SIS secretary whom Rose Edwardes then approached.[35] The recruitment attempt failed but the episode illustrates Soviet tradecraft for handling sources with access to information deemed important to Moscow.

In a classic example of 'false-flag' recruitment, Edwardes posed as an American secret service agent and sounded out one Mrs Moon, employed at the SIS office on Melbury Road. They met at least three times and though Edwardes offered ample compensation plus good bonuses for particularly valuable intelligence, she ultimately failed to persuade the nervous secretary. Still, officials acknowledged that while conversing with Edwardes, Moon disclosed much about her employer. Allen added that aside from Melbury Road, FPA/VDA detectives constantly watched other SIS offices on Adam Street and, later, Broadway buildings. On Soviet instructions, FPA paid particular attention to the headquarters on Victoria Street of the passport control office,[36] which provided official cover for SIS officers operating abroad, not least along Russian borders.

After establishing his network, Ewer quickly realized that British counterintelligence relied primarily on telephone and postal intercepts. Learning of a photostat section in the post office whose function was to copy suspicious correspondence, FPA promptly found a way in. Intriguingly, Sir Vernon Kell's responsibility for MI5 – 'the organization at Cromwell Road' – was apparently first realized only when his retirement from the army was announced by 'a longish paragraph in the *News of the World* on 6 April 1924'. Suspicious of this 'official obituary', FPA located Kell's residence, kept watch, and soon confirmed his regular trips to 35 Cromwell Road.[37]

Tracing British secret organizations was easy for two reasons. Not only were employees, messengers, and official cars efficiently shadowed, but FPA's most valuable source had also given Ewer two key addresses early on – Cromwell Road and Adam Street. Moreover, as early as January 1920, the same source had already supplied detailed information about Indian political intelligence, years before the name even appeared in print.[38] This may challenge previous assumptions on British countersubversive successes against the Soviets in the contested ideological battleground that was 1920s India.[39]

Yet FPA burrowed even deeper. In naval intelligence, a female typist apparently spied for Ewer for a few months, until being dismissed from the admiralty due to personnel reductions. Allen also insisted that the group had employed an Indian named Karandikar who provided information obtained from two women at the India and colonial offices, although the security service never determined

[35] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 809a), pp. 10–11.

[36] KV 2/989 (fo. 66a), pp. 6–7; 24 July 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 63A), p. 3, 27 June 1928 (fo. 2A), p. 2; Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 4.

[37] 20 Aug. 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 72A), pp. 4–5.

[38] 29 Apr. 1929, KV 2/990 (fo. 105a), p. 2; 20 Aug. 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 72A), p. 6.

[39] See Richard J. Popplewell, *Intelligence and imperial defence: British intelligence and the defence of the Indian empire, 1904–1924* (London, 1995).

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their identities.[40] Even the foreign office (FO) leaked information. When lunching with aides and journalists, an official named Sir Arthur Willert[41] sometimes discussed confidential matters that a subordinate of his duly noted. The 'observant junior' was never identified.[42]

V

Until the May 1927 Arcos raid, FPA had no financial difficulties. Eva Reckitt,[43] another co-conspirator of Ewer's, often received from abroad money ultimately intended for him. American currency was sometimes used, with Moscow forwarding the required amounts to agents in the United States, who then passed everything on to Karl Hässler (New York FPA), who in turn redirected the cash either to Reckitt in London or to Slocombe in Paris.[44] Before the raid, funds in American dollars for the CPGB, the national minority movement (NMM),[45] and FPA came to Chesham house via diplomatic bag. Ewer received the FPA share, while Andrew Rothstein[46] collected sums arriving quarterly for the CPGB and the NMM, each respectively receiving $20,000 and $16,000 annually. Rothstein then handed the funds over to Albert Inkpin (secretary) of the CPGB and Nathaniel Watkins of the NMM.[47]

Another of Ewer's lieutenants, Walter Milton Holmes,[48] sometimes also arranged for the conversion of American into British currency. After the Arcos raid,

[40] KV 2/989 (fo. 66a), pp. 6–7; 24 July 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 63A), p. 3, 27 June 1928 (fo. 2A), p. 2; Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 4.

[41] Sir Arthur Willert (1882–1973). British journalist and official; head of the first FO news department; 1917–18: secretary of the British war mission in Washington; representative of the ministry of information; 1921–34: member of several British delegations to international conferences. http://www.library.yale.edu/un/house/colldesc.htm#willert, accessed 23 Mar. 2003, Yahoo. If Willert '"leaked" information, it was likely to have been deliberate'. E-mail correspondence: Dr Gill Bennett, Cambridge, June 2003.

[42] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), pp. 6–7; 27 June 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 2A), p. 3.

[43] Wealthy heiress, almost certainly the chief financial supporter of the CPGB (though not an open member). Only official tie with that party, known since 1926, seemed to be her post in the executive committee of the communist-run Labour party research department. She knew all leading CPGB members. Part II, Reckitt, KV 2/1016, p. 5.

[44] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), pp. 7–8.

[45] Created in 1924. Composed of militant members from existing trade unions, this organization was an offshoot of the CPGB, seeking to modernize the trade union movement by reducing bureaucracy and removing those deemed to collaborate with owners. Ultimately, the goal was workers's control of the industries. http://www.hull.ac.uk/oldlib/archives/pressure/nmm.html, accessed 23 Mar. 2003, Yahoo.

[46] Son of Theodore Rothstein, an important Bolshevik agent in Great Britain throughout the interwar period. Young Rothstein was a Brackenbury scholar at Balliol college, Oxford, and followed in his father's footsteps. Report 44 – revolutionary organizations in the United Kingdom, 4 Mar. 1920, CP 791, CAB 24/99, p. 7. The *Mitrokhin archive* tells us that Andrew Rothstein recommended to Soviet intelligence one Melita Norwood, who became one of the longest-serving spies of the cold war. Rothstein mentioned her to Moscow in 1935; by 1937, she had been recruited. Ongoing research on the 'Norwood affair' by Dr David Burke has established that recruitment happened after a meeting of the Friends of the Soviet Union in Finchley, where the Norwoods were then living.

[47] 7 Sept. 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 77a), p. 1. Approximately £129,114 and £103,291 (2002).

[48] Communist journalist who left the *Herald* for the *Sunday Worker* in 1928, becoming their Moscow correspondent for a spell. Knew Eva Reckitt and Rose Edwardes. Part II, Holmes, KV 2/1016, p. 7.

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Inkpin himself began travelling to Berlin to collect funds, even though CPGB and NMM yearly stipends by then had been reduced respectively to $16,000 and $12,000. Inkpin normally took American currency to Paris. There, he met one or more of three women – usually, one Rose Cohen[49] – at meetings arranged by George Slocombe. These women brought the notes back to London, where Holmes then arranged for exchange into English money. Several people, including Robin Arnott (Labour party research department) occasionally 'laundered' small denominations through change bureaux and travel agencies. Inkpin and Watkins finally collected the 'clean' funds for disbursement to branches of their respective organizations. After delivering money to Paris, Inkpin normally returned to Berlin, re-entering England via Harwich, Essex. This was an ideal entryway for CPGB members, as special branch (SB) officers there were lax, according to Ewer's prize sources. They were right: Inkpin's movements were never noticed.[50]

Authorities were also keen to learn of FPA communications arrangements. Allen explained that on Wednesdays and Fridays, Chesham house received all collected information. Rose Edwardes carried the material, always watched by VDA detectives on her taxi journeys to and from the embassy. After the Arcos incident, information was sent instead to Paris by secret ink used in a book, with Rose Edwardes and Dale as couriers. Ewer communicated with Slocombe and others abroad by ordinary post, using cover addresses and plain-language codes.[51]

Who at Chesham house handled this intelligence was always meticulously concealed from FPA members, but a mistake by Ewer once allowed Allen to hear the name 'Vasilloff or Vasiltseff'. Records existed at MI5 of one Nikolai Vasiltseff, born 1 November 1893, and sent to London by the Soviet foreign ministry to join the legation as assistant head of the consular section. Arriving in or around May 1924, he stayed for two years. Vasiltseff was relieved by one Kuznetsov. Records listed a Timofei Kuznetsov, born 15 May 1890, who requested in 1925 permission to proceed to Britain from Berlin to buy textiles. Arriving here on 30 March 1926, he left the following month, reapplying for entry in November 1926 to order textile machinery. Ivan Mingulin, appointed in June 1924 as clerk to the trade delegation, eventually replaced Kuznetsov. Arriving in 1925, Mingulin was instead listed as a correspondent with the embassy's press department.[52] Once or twice, Allen said, FPA suspected Moscow of trying to inspect their work. On one occasion, FPA definitely knew of a man sent over to monitor operations, prompting Ewer to object bitterly to Chesham house.[53]

Interviewed in 1950, most likely as part of final official inquiries into FPA activities three decades earlier, Ewer clarified matters. He and Walter Holmes had frequently visited the embassy and the trade delegation, from where several

[49] Communist who travelled to Moscow frequently in the 1920s. Knew Eva Reckitt. Part II, Cohen, KV 2/1016, pp. 3–4. Stipends would be about £103,291 and £77,468 (2002).

[50] 7 Sept. 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 77a), pp. 1–2.

[51] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), pp. 7–8.

[52] 20 Aug. 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 72A), p. 11.

[53] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), pp. 7–8.

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Bolsheviks had assisted FPA operations: Klishko, one Maisky, one Radomsky, and one of the Miller brothers (Peter or Anton), then second secretary at the legation. Ewer plainly viewed Holmes, his chief assistant, as 'a complete Communist fanatic' who betrayed to Moscow any information gathered. On the secret service announcement in the *Herald* of late 1924, the declared aim was to draw 'the fire of the British authorities'. On how many in his network knew that the Russians received every scrap of collected intelligence, he replied 'all'. Finally, Ewer advised that 'a keen eye' always be kept on Andrew Rothstein, another 'fanatical communist'.[54]

VI

In August 1928, nine months after quitting FPA and in financial difficulties, Allen 'was induced to talk to MI5', stunning them by relating for the first time that two officers at Scotland Yard's special branch had long worked for Ewer. The significance of this revelation cannot be overstated. For contrary to common misconception, throughout the period here examined (and until a reorganization of the British intelligence community in September 1931), special branch, not MI5, was the lead agency in countering communist subversion in Great Britain.[55]

Holding out for recompense, Allen did not name the men instantly, so a full-scale investigation began immediately to ascertain whether anyone once employed at Outer Temple still spied for Moscow. Rose Edwardes was shadowed and found to travel regularly to Holborn, where she supposedly ran the Featherstone typewriting bureau. Surveillance showed that she, Ewer, Holmes, and Dale regularly met there and that afterwards, either Ewer or Holmes routinely

[54] 30 Jan. 1950, KV 2/1017 (fo. 1105a), pp. 3–5.

[55] Institutional rivalry was also a reflection of personality clashes at the highest levels. For instance, there was no love lost between Vernon Kell and Basil Thomson, in charge of SB from 1913 until his promotion to director of intelligence at the home office in 1919. Wartime secrecy had prevented Kell from publicly basking in the glory of security service successes in smashing German espionage networks, with SB's aid. Thomson, heading that civilian agency, could and did so with gusto, greatly angering Kell. Diametrically opposed temperaments – Kell, reserved; Thomson, flamboyant – stoked the rivalry, one intensified by the overlap in responsibility for overseeing subversion. Most of Thomson's supporters – hardliners such as Winston Churchill – disliked Kell. For MI5, peacetime heralded operational difficulties caused not only by sharp reductions in staff and funding, but also by having to share with SB the monitoring of communists. By mid-1919, while the security service ran counterespionage on British soil and tracked seditious movements within the military, SB scrutinized all civilian revolutionary movements. Following the Bolshevik uprising of late 1917, MI5 set up a section to track Russian espionage but not Comintern activity; this remained SB's responsibility except where communists aimed to subvert the armed forces. For much of the interwar period, Comintern organizations remained the preferred conduits for Soviet espionage. Kell's service retained responsibility for counterespionage, but funding decreased by about two-thirds between 1918 and 1920. Partially, this was a 'peace dividend', but Thomson's inflation of subversive threats to become head of the intelligence community (as he and some of his supporters had envisioned) also played a role. Relatively lavish funding for Thomson's directorate of intelligence at the home office only deepened Kell's resentment of his adversary's exclusive responsibility for monitoring all types of civilian subversion, labour unrest, and revolutionary activity. This did not change until 1931.

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visited Eva Reckitt. Intense scrutiny soon paid off, uncovering Dale's meetings with Inspector Hubert van Ginhoven and Sergeant C. Jane.[56] These prized penetration agents ('moles') had provided lists of suspects, subjects of postal intercept warrants, addresses of British intelligence offices, and information on SB operations.[57] The staggering security breach was instantly communicated to the home office. On 11 April 1929, Ginhoven, Jane, and Dale were seized. Although their treachery was irrefutable, the authorities thought it wiser not to prosecute. The Yard dismissed both officers on 2 May 1929.

Dale's diary chronicled his two distinct roles. From January 1922 to May 1927, he was the group's private detective. With Allen's November 1927 departure from FPA, Dale then assumed the role of cut-out between Ewer and his SB 'moles', until they were finally detained in April 1929.[58] The officers provided constantly-updated lists of people whose correspondence was to be intercepted; on whom 'special instructions had been issued to Aliens Officers at ports' (like Harwich); and about whom 'any of the intelligence services had communicated with Scotland House'. Both officers also forewarned Ewer of any imminent raids against communist persons or organizations,[59] letting him tip off those whom British authorities sought. The foray into Arcos, said Allen, was one of the few surprises, as the policemen involved were deliberately misinformed that they were headed for government dockyards.[60] Even many in the British intelligence community were surprised by the raid, not only because it was shrouded in tight operational security but also because the decision to enter 49 Moorgate Street was made at the last minute.[61]

Initially recommended to Ewer by Jack Hayes in 1919 as someone who could obtain inside information at the Yard on the 'forged *Pravda*' affair, Ginhoven first met Allen at Vigilance house (VDA headquarters). Thereafter, they worked closely until November 1927. Even without corroborating evidence, this author would submit that Allen may well have been first to point out Ginhoven. Recall that before changing his name and joining Ewer's outfit in mid-1919, Allen – a communist, or at least a socialist – had been a sergeant at Scotland Yard and thus well positioned to know whom to recommend for recruitment. As a veteran officer, he had considerable access to valuable information, which he undoubtedly compromised initially (trying to impress Ewer, his prospective employer) and later on, working at FPA. What is certain is that much remains unclear about Allen's role within the network.

He first noticed Jane when Ginhoven, born in the Netherlands, accompanied that country's queen on a visit to northern England. Someone else now had to

[56] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 5.

[57] KV 2/989 (fo. 66a), pp. 6–7; 24 July 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 63A), p. 3, 27 June 1928 (fo. 2A), p. 2; Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 4.

[58] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 5.

[59] Idem (fo. 867a), p. 2.

[60] 20 Aug. 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 72A), p. 1.

[61] Gill Bennett, 'The Arcos raid of 1927'. Presentation to Study Group on Intelligence, Royal United Services Institute, 31 Jan. 2003.

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maintain contact with FPA; Ginhoven suggested Jane. Subsequently, the latter filled in anytime the former was away. Allen categorized thus the priceless intelligence received from both officers: (i) accessing 'the Special Branch registry and see what developments these cards indicated'; (ii) providing 'any information regarding lists of suspects sent to the ports'; (iii) supplying 'information on … individuals whose correspondence might be on check'; and (iv) securing 'any … information … [on Yard] activities … [of interest to] … the Russians or the CPGB'.[62]

Some of this the two obtained by infiltrating the registry at night, gathering additional intelligence while carrying out their ordinary duties (particularly Ginhoven, who often translated sensitive documents). He also appears to have acquired information from girls at the registry whom he seduced or for whom he did favours. A sensational raid (most likely the October 1925 one) on the King Street headquarters of the CPGB typifies the advance warnings to FPA. Jane – apparently involved either in the search or its planning – telephoned Rose Edwardes, alerting her to the impending event. Fearing eavesdroppers, however, they communicated guardedly. She misinterpreted Jane and failed to warn others. This particular incursion against the CPGB was one of the most successful in the interwar years.[63]

As mentioned, the 1927 Arcos raid was a rare occasion about which Ewer received no advance warning. Yet thanks to the SB 'moles', he eventually did learn the identities of officers involved in the action and of those who visited Arcos afterward. Among them was Guy Liddell, a leading SB countersubversion expert. In late 1928, an investigator examining the FPA case presciently wrote that 'information of this character could only have come either through carelessness or connivance on the part of the police'.[64] As one of the two main 'contact officers' at special branch, Liddell had been particularly 'cross not to be told about the raid' by his superiors 'until the last moment'.[65]

On 3 May 1929, the *Daily Mail* finally exposed the treachery:

> Two officers of the political branch of Scotland Yard were yesterday dismissed … They were inspector Ginhoven, who has for many years been entrusted with important secret service missions, and sergeant Jane, whose special work brought him into close touch with the Reds … Ginhoven was one of the most romantic figures at Scotland Yard. He is a Dutchman by birth. Early in life, he became naturalized, and has served in the police for more than 20 years. About a year ago, he was promoted inspector. He was easily Scotland Yard's best linguist, and is stated to have an expert knowledge of eight tongues … Jane also had an excellent reputation. His knowledge of the Communist movement was vast and intelligent.[66]

[62] 12 Apr. 1929, KV 2/990 (fo. 104a), p. 2.
[63] Ibid., p. 3.
[64] 15 Oct. 1928, KV 2/989 (fo. 83a), p. 2.
[65] E-mail correspondence: Dr Gill Bennett, Cambridge, June 2003.
[66] 3 May 1929, KV 2/997 (newspaper clipping), pp. 1–2.

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In 1950, Ewer confirmed all of the above and went even further: his organization revolved entirely around Ginhoven and Jane. From them, FPA obtained most of its information. Both officers, he said, were communists first and foremost.[67]

Days after their dismissal, the Featherstone typewriting bureau closed down. Ewer, previously thought to have used Polish diplomatic channels for correspondence relating to his clandestine work, left for Poland instantly, returning to Britain in September 1929. Weeks later, he fell out with the CPGB, which disapproved of an article of his in *Labour Monthly*. In December, Ewer resigned his party membership.[68] Despite knowing that Indian communists used the 'Kenneth Milton' channel from Paris to London, and even though Ewer had been a card-carrying communist, the security service thought it unlikely that the CPGB knew much about his espionage work.[69]

Thereafter, reports warily detailed Ewer's public avowals of anti-communism and intent to attack the party whenever possible. Though appearing to have parted with the movement, remarked one cagey MI5 officer, there was perhaps 'more to [the] resignation from the Communist Party than meets the eye'. Ewer eventually returned to journalism, becoming an accomplished columnist. Walter Holmes continued working as a reporter. George Slocombe remained in Paris until 1940, then returning to Britain, not having drawn official interest since the 'Milton' business in 1925. Rose Edwardes, Walter Dale, and Allen apparently severed all ties with Soviet intelligence. Allen was last heard of in 1936, working as a masseur in Bournemouth.[70] Remarkably, none of the above seems ever to have been prosecuted, despite abundant evidence acquired not only from years of investigations but also from confessions.

VII

How, then, do these revelations change existing perceptions of Bolshevik interwar efforts to subvert British government? Soviet military intelligence remained Moscow's best foreign intelligence supplier until the Stalinist purges of 1936–8. Why? First, this service skilfully used the Comintern from its inception as a front, deceiving countless communists and 'fellow-travellers' worldwide into working *for* the Soviet Union and not exclusively *against* fascism. Second, many key RU/Comintern personnel were urbane polyglots. Comfortable among Europe's polite society,[71] such individuals differed starkly from their *Cheka* brethren early on, many of them poorly educated and better suited for internal repression in provincial Russia than for sparkling conversation in fashionable Paris. Undeniably, *Cheka* boasted exceptional officers, as the 1918 'envoys' plot', and operations

[67] 30 Jan. 1950, KV 2/1017 (fo. 1105a), p. 3.
[68] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 1101), p. 6.
[69] Ibid., p. 8.
[70] Ibid., p. 6.
[71] In Dec. 1924, the Soviet foreign ministry reproached Rakovsky for the excessive spending of his Paris agents and their relative lack of success, compared to Comintern agents. The Comintern executive, the note said, was often better and more rapidly informed than the ministry. *Compte-rendu de renseignements spéciaux no. 195: Bolchevisme, 22 janvier 1925*. FM c. 229, d. 1548, p. 285.

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'Sindikat' and 'Trest'[72] proved. Yet for much of the 1920s, all *Cheka* activity abroad – despite elaborate transnational components – remained overwhelmingly domestic in its ultimate goal: eliminating counterrevolutionary opposition.

Or so we thought. Instead, this affair reveals a dedicated group of about fifteen agents and sub-agents that for a decade worked relentlessly to penetrate Whitehall. From 1919 to 1929, the Federated Press of America infiltrated the admiralty; the colonial, foreign, India, and post offices; special branch; the French foreign ministry; and some of its embassies. Furthermore, Ewer's group almost certainly obtained information harmful to British national security on Indian political intelligence; MI5; SIS; the codebreakers at GCCS; (possibly) on Woolwich arsenal; and on arrangements between the home and post offices, and cable companies to intercept written correspondence and telephone conversations. Moreover, given that VDA detectives also watched select foreign legations in London, one should not be surprised if Moscow penetrated them, though no evidence exists of that having happened through FPA. One should also stress that though FPA succeeded in penetrating several government departments, with the exception of SB, these appear to have been relatively low-level infiltrations and certainly not on par with those achieved years later by the 'Cambridge five'. The corridors of power in Whitehall were more easily penetrated in the 1930s than in the previous decade.

A most striking aspect – one not done justice by the overview here presented – was the adaptability of this spy ring in challenging conditions. Only eight months after the dreaded *Cheka* was born and as Russia convulsed its way through a horrific civil war, Ewer apparently became active. Thus, notwithstanding international communications and travel disruptions, parts of the network were passing information to Moscow by mid-1919. This feat can only have been achieved through 'illegals' – spies living under assumed identities, without diplomatic protection – here or abroad. For the *Cheka*'s foreign intelligence arm (INO) was not established until 20 December 1920[73] and 'legals' arrived – or, in Nikolai Klishko's case, returned – only in May 1920, amid the Bolshevik trade delegation. This author would venture that Russian intelligence archives may confirm someday that such 'illegals' were indeed Bolshevik émigrés living in Great Britain up to

[72] The 'envoys' plot' was a quasi-independent attempt by some western and Menshevik secret agents to overthrow the Bolsheviks. Early on, the *Cheka* penetrated the plot. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Mitrokhin*, pp. 32–5. 'Sindikat' was the Soviet operation to capture the leading counterrevolutionary Boris Savinkov, while 'Trest' was aimed at infiltrating and destroying Menshevik organizations abroad. Andrew and Gordievsky, *KGB*, pp. 68–78.

[73] Christopher Andrew points out that in 1918, 'the Cheka began sending officers and agents under various disguises and pseudonyms behind enemy lines to gather intelligence. By June 1919, the number of these 'illegals' was sufficiently large to require the foundation of an illegals operations department.' Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Mitrokhin*, pp. 36–7. This begs the question: why the delay between establishing the 'illegals' department (June 1919) and the INO (Dec. 1920)? If 'illegals' were in place by 1918, then foreign operations were clearly already underway. Was INO created just as an administrative 'adjustment', to validate an already-existing situation?

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November 1917.[74] Klishko and Maxim Litvinov lived and conspired in London before the revolution. That the first man initially ran the Ewer network and the second eventually became a Soviet foreign minister illustrates the point perfectly.

Another important feature is that at least eight of the FPA members here mentioned were disaffected policemen, most – if not all – being communist sympathizers.[75] One former officer, VDA chief, and police union leader Jack Hayes even won a Labour seat for Liverpool in the 1929 general election. Thus, at least one Soviet agent worked in the House of Commons in the 1930s.[76] Ironically, such militancy in the supposedly conservative institutions that were national police forces was precisely what enabled Moscow to infiltrate Scotland Yard. By compromising the lead agency tasked with fighting them, the Bolsheviks applied lessons perfected during long, hard years as revolutionaries in Russia, where they perpetually tried to stave off (unsuccessfully) infiltration by agents of the *Okhrana*, the feared tsarist secret police.

Also very interesting is that the newest, most secretive of British intelligence agencies, GCCS, was apparently identified within a year or two of its creation in November 1919, whereas FPA did not learn of Vernon Kell's role as director-general of the security service (founded in 1909) until mid-1924, five years after the network emerged. Perhaps this temporarily reflected Soviet priorities, for in June 1918 Ernst Fetterlein – a leading tsarist codebreaker – had defected to England.[77] Maybe Moscow needed to ascertain just how much the British now knew. For by helping GCCS to penetrate, among others, Bolshevik diplomatic codes and ciphers, Fetterlein afforded Great Britain a vital strategic advantage in international relations during the 1920s and beyond.

Events related above could therefore mean that incidents previously thought of as isolated strokes of luck for Soviet intelligence (e.g., penetrating the FO communications department in the late 1920s) were actually part of a longstanding, concerted Bolshevik campaign to expose weaknesses in Whitehall and infiltrate it. Hence, most tantalizing of all, in the late 1920s, correspondence began between Ewer and two acquaintances: a noted orientalist and a young economist. Entirely unremarkable in itself, were it not that the two were none other than Harold St John Philby and Maurice Dobb.[78] One was the outspoken, anti-establishment father of 'Kim' Philby; the other, the Cambridge economics don who truly

[74] In France, for instance, the Bolsheviks had long relied upon Russian émigrés for intelligence operations. The same surely happened in Great Britain. *La représentation des Soviets à Paris et l'action du GPU en France, 5 janvier 1925*, FM c. 229, d. 1548, pp. 291–2.

[75] Joe Paul, Rose Edwardes's father, was another ex-policeman and chief VDA detective before Dale took over. See also n. 22. Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 809a), p. 6.

[76] General election of 1929, KV 2/998 (fo. 122B).

[77] See Michael Smith, 'The Government Code and Cipher School and the first cold war', in Michael Smith and Ralph Erskine, eds., *Action this day: Bletchley Park from the breaking of the Enigma code to the birth of the modern computer* (London, 2001), pp. 17–18; Madeira, 'No wishful thinking', footnotes.

[78] KV 2/1109 (fo. 23A), p. 6; Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 755a, red sheet); KV 2/1118 (fos. 12a, 9a). By 1925, Dobb already corresponded with Andrew Rothstein. As for Philby Sr, he often sent Ewer copies of letters on Arab affairs.

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introduced communism to young Philby, a Trinity student in the early 1930s. This college does indeed occupy a unique position in the annals of Soviet espionage and subversion. A recent biography of Victor Rothschild reveals, to no great surprise, that a colleague who came up with him to Trinity in 1935 had joined the CPGB within months. The undergraduate was recruited by yet another college man, Denis William Ewer,[79] son of our very own William Norman Ewer!

Hopefully, this article – the first detailed examination of early Bolshevik espionage in Great Britain – will improve our understanding of interwar Anglo-Russian relations. Yet one would do well to heed the words of those who caution anyone working with government records, for in this story there are some unsettling inconsistencies. Due to the truncated nature of evidence in the released files, such inconsistencies cannot easily be answered but are certainly worth further research. For instance, intriguing questions surround the winding-down of FPA operations in 1928 and their subsequent resumption. Did MI5 pass itself off as the Soviets, to reactivate the network and nab an indeterminate number of 'moles' still at large? Recall that Allen did not at once reveal their names, hoping to get a reward; but recall also that officers preparing to raid Arcos in May 1927 were misinformed as to their true destination.

Within months of the network being reactivated, Ginhoven and Jane had been unmasked *without* Allen's direct help, as he revealed their names only the day *after* they had been arrested.[80]

What is obvious is that Ewer's group greatly damaged British counter-intelligence and countersubversive efforts against the 'reds' in the 1920s and probably well into the 1930s also. One intelligence officer wrote candidly:

> It became abundantly clear that for … ten years, any information regarding subversive organizations and individuals supplied to Scotland Yard by SIS or MI5, which had become the subject of Special Branch police enquiry, would have to be regarded as having been betrayed to Ewer's group. Through his sources in the Special Branch, Ewer was enabled to give warning to suspects and subversive organizations of suspicions entertained or of projected police action, to nullify the effects of security measures, to cripple enquiry, and thus positively to enhance the successful operations of the Communist conspiracy in the United Kingdom and its promotion from abroad.[81]

[79] Kenneth Rose, *Elusive Rothschild: the life of Victor, third baron* (London, 2003), p. 51.

[80] 12 Apr. 1929, KV 2/990 (fo. 104a), pp. 1–2. One expert states that even before the Arcos raid, suspicions already abounded 'about the trustworthiness of Special Branch', even if 'no definite suspect' existed. E-mail correspondence: Dr Gill Bennett, Cambridge, June 2003.

[81] Sept. 1949, KV 2/1016 (fo. 809a), p. 12.

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